

Redefining Verism: A Study of Roman Portraiture

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by

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‘Verism’ is often considered the first, and perhaps only, truly Roman artistic style. For a society whose art largely revolved around the imitation of Greek originals, the appearance of this new and seemingly original form of representation is quite shocking. Indeed, the true origin of the practice of veristic representation has long been debated among scholars. The Romans often employed Greek artists to create their sculptures, adding a further complication in understanding whether ‘veristic’ portraiture was a purely Roman practice. Upon consideration of the portraiture on Etruscan sarcophagi and tomb paintings or the practice of creating portraits of the deceased in Egypt, the question becomes even more complex. Discerning the origins of ‘veristic’ portraiture requires an analysis of Greek, Egyptian, and Etruscan practices, as well as the funerary practices of the early Romans.

Many scholars attempt to define and analyze ‘veristic’ portraiture, but all seem to arrive at the same issue. Art historians often interpret this form of representation as the true likeness of an individual.¹ At the same time, it is shown to be a representation of a physiological ideal of sternness and severity. These two definitions are often used together, as our understanding of an ideal Roman type is an elderly man, whose representation shows the “warts and wrinkles” of true likeness and whose expression is serious. Many fail to recognize that this definition, which combines the concepts of true likeness and the representation of a type, is contradictory. This contradiction is established in the very definition of the term “verism.”

A thorough understanding of the terms that surround Roman portraiture is crucial for an in depth analysis of this art form. A portrait is a representation of an individual. Such representations can be seen in Etruscan, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman art. Though more prevalent in some areas than in others, it is this reoccurring nature of individualized portraiture

¹ It is worthy of note that it is impossible for modern scholars to determine whether a representation is a completely accurate portrayal of an individual.

that creates a difficulty in identifying the origin of such a practice. Greek art, in particular, places an importance on characterization. Rather than showing an individual for his or her true form, certain character types are employed to create an understanding of the individual being represented. Greek art also tends to idealize its subjects. In contrast to such practices, Roman portraiture of the Late Republic and Early Empire is understood to be concerned with the ‘veristic’ representation of the individual. ‘Verism’ is said to show the “warts and wrinkles,” meaning that all details of the human form, even the ugly parts, are shown in the representation. This contrasts greatly with the Greek practice of idealized character types.

Jeremy Tanner provides a succinct definition of verism as a careful description of “the distinguishing features of its sitter . . . [with] particular emphasis on physiognomical peculiarities.” He explicitly interprets verism as a representation of the true physical form of the individual. Nevertheless, he discusses the use of “art as a medium of socio-cultural action” and “portraits . . . as a form of propaganda.”² Though an accurate representation of an individual could certainly be *used* for propaganda, the implication in Tanner’s essay is that the portraits were *created* for propaganda. If this were the case, then the significance of these ‘veristic’ portraits lay in the characterization of a type rather than the accurate representation of the true physical form.

A similar contradiction lies in Gisela Richter’s explanation of portraiture. Richter discusses the “dry realism” of ‘veristic’ representation, which uses no “idealizing tendencies . . . [and has] an expression not of a philosopher or poet or visionary, but of what might be called a man of affairs.” Her concern in this definition is to show how Roman ‘veristic’ representations differ from Greek portraits of philosophers and other character types. According to Richter, the

² In his essay, Tanner strives to emphasize the social functions of art, which “serves to construct relationships of power and solidarity.” (18)

Romans were depicting a true likeness rather than a character type. At the same time, her understanding of ‘verism’ is a portrait that portrays a “man of affairs,” which is a character type. This characterization differs from any of the Greek characters, and certainly the representation of this type may show the “warts and wrinkles” rather than an idealized form; nevertheless, a “man of affairs” is a trope in Roman portraiture. Richter further conflates these two ideas, suggesting that “in a portrait the physiognomy of the person represented has importance.” Essentially, the physiognomy is not shown for the sake of realistic representation, but rather to serve as a means of characterization.³

The variation in definition also exists between scholars. David Jackson stresses the “ultra-physical realism” of ‘verism’ which avoids “idealizing tendencies in preference for the prosaic.”⁴ His article then argues that such a form of representation might come from either the Roman obsession with showing the experience of their ancestors in the wax masks or from the negative “psychological attitude” of the Greek artists who were commissioned to create Roman portraits. Jackson explains ‘veristic’ representation as realism with a tendency towards characterizing. Seymour Howard takes a contrasting view, suggesting that ‘verism’ is “an uncensored recording of facial detail” used to “exaggerate, almost to caricature, idiosyncratic features.”⁵ Whereas Jackson shows the portraits to be realistic with character types applied, Howard claims that the portraits were realistic in order to portray a character type.

Sheldon Nodelman recognizes the contradiction of the term ‘verism.’ He describes Roman portraiture as having “an unprecedented capacity to articulate and project the interior processes of human experience.” He acknowledges the realism of Roman portraits, but recognizes that these portraits should be understood as “a system of signs” employed to convey a

³ See Richter’s definition of verism in her essay on the origins of Roman veristic portraiture, 39

⁴ Jackson, 32

⁵ Howard, 107

specific message to the observer. Nodelman describes ‘verism’ as both a “social expression” and an example of Roman realism. The “unflattering physiognomic irregularities” of ‘veristic’ portraits create highly individualized representations, whose less than favorable physical appearance points to a departure from “idealization”; however, these “physical and characterological traits” end up creating portraits that all look the same, creating a “conventional type” with a political function rather than a true likeness for its own right. Nodelman recognizes both the physiognomic and psychological aspects of the ‘veristic’ style.⁶

I would like to propose a new way of looking at Roman ‘veristic’ representation. This term proves to be a contradiction and has become a completely arbitrary description of art. Various portrait types have been reinterpreted and reshaped in order to fit into our understandings of idealism, individualism, characterization, and ‘verism’. ‘Verism’ seems to be applicable only to the portraits of elderly men, whose faces show sternness and experience. Such portraits are easy to point to as representations of individuals, as their extensive detail makes each portrait distinguishable from its counterparts. However, if we are to understand ‘verism’ to mean the realistic representation of a physical form, then portraits of men who are not so heavily wrinkled would be included in this category. The fact that this is not the case suggests that our understanding of ‘verism’ should not be focused on the idea of a true likeness, rather on the representation of a certain Roman trope that shows age and experience. The term ‘verism’ has become conflated to include two contradictory understandings of representation. We must look at both aspects of ‘verism’ in order to understand how they are to be separated. Portraits created in true likeness of an individual existed before the Romans, but the character type of age and severity was a Roman innovation.

The idea that the Romans were the first to create portraits in true likeness of individuals

⁶ Nodelman, 38-41

likely stems from our extensive literary sources that describe the appearance of individuals. Such evidence can be used to match portraits to their descriptions, such as Plutarch's description of Pompey. Plutarch carefully describes his youthfulness and similitude to Alexander the Great.⁷ With such a description, we can identify the portrait of Pompey and understand the personality behind the portrayal. Coins can also be used to identify portraits. Another reason that Romans are believed to have invented the depiction of true likeness is their practice of creating *imagines* of the deceased. The *imagines* were portraits representing the ancestors of a Roman family, and these portraits were displayed in the home and at funerals as a reminder of the greatness of the household's ancestors. Various ancient authors reference this practice. Diodorus, in his discussion on Roman funerary practices, comments on the *imagines* displayed at funerals:

των παρ Ρωμαιων οι ταις ευγενειαις και προγονων δοξη διαφεροντες μετα την
τελευτην ειδωλοποιουνται κατα τε την του χαρακτηρος ομοιοτητα και κατα την
ολην του σωματος περιγραφην, μιμητας εχοντες εκ παντος του βιου
παρατετηρηκοτας την τε πορειαν και τας κατα μέρος ιδιοτητας της εμφασεως

“Those of the Romans who are the most well-born and are distinguished by the glory of their ancestors are portrayed after death in a way which is most like their features and which represents their whole bodies. They use actors who have observed a man's bearing and the details of his individual appearance throughout his whole life.”⁸

Diodorus's description makes it clear that portraits were made after death with the goal of accurately representing the individual's physical features. The true glory of the man was determined by the glory of his ancestors, and this glory was remembered by the creation of these death masks. Livy discusses the instructions Marcus Aemilius Lepidus gave concerning his own funeral:

*imaginum specie, non sumptibus nobilitari magnorum virorum funera solere*⁹

⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey*, 2.1

⁸ All translations come from Flower; this fragment of Diodorus is quoted by Photius (*Bibliothèque* 383B). Diodorus 31. 25. 2

⁹ Livy, *Periochae* 48

“[He said that] the funerals of great men are accustomed to be renowned/ ‘noble’ not by their cost but by the spectacle of the masks.”

Livy uses the word *imagines*, and he shows that these masks were exceedingly important to Roman society. Just as in Diodorus, Livy makes it clear that the parade of ancestral masks brought honor and glory to a man’s name.

Polybius discusses the funerary practices of the Romans in around 150 BCE. He explains how the body is laid out and the eulogy is given, recounting the virtues of the deceased:

δι’ ὧν συμβαίνει τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀναμνησκομένους καὶ λαμβάνοντας ὑπὸ τὴν ὄψιν τὰ γεγονότα, μὴ μόνον τοὺς κεκοινωνηκότας τῶν ἔργων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐκτός, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον γίνεσθαι συμπαθεῖς ὥστε μὴ τῶν κηδευόντων ἴδιον, ἀλλὰ κοινὸν τοῦ δήμου φαίνεσθαι τὸ σύμπτωμα. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα θάψαντες καὶ ποιήσαντες τὰ νομιζόμενα τιθῶσι τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ μεταλλάξαντος εἰς τὸν ἐπιφανέστατον τόπον τῆς οἰκίας, ζύλιναν αἰδία περιτιθέντες. ἡ δ’ εἰκὼν ἐστὶ πρόσωπον εἰς ὁμοιότητα διαφερόντως ἐξεργασμένον καὶ κατὰ τὴν πλάσιν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ὑπογραφὴν. ταύτας δὲ τὰς εἰκόνας ἔν τε ταῖς δημοτελέσι θυσίαις ἀνοίγοντες κοσμοῦσι φιλοτίμως, ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν μεταλλάξῃ τις ἐπιφανής, ἄγουσιν εἰς τὴν ἐκφορὰν, περιτιθέντες ὡς ὁμοιοτάτοις εἶναι δοκοῦσι κατὰ τὴν μέγεθος καὶ τὴν ἄλλην περικοπήν. οὗτοι δὲ προσαναλαμβάνουσιν ἐσθῆτας, ἐὰν μὲν ὕπατος ἢ στρατηγὸς ἦ γεγονώς, περιπορφύρους, ἐὰν δὲ τιμητὴς, πορφυράς, ἐὰν δὲ καὶ τεθριαμβευκὸς ἦ τι τοιοῦτον κατεργασμένος, διαχρύσους. αὐτοὶ μὲν οὖν ἐφ’ ἁρμάτων οὗτοι πορεύονται, ῥάβδοι δὲ καὶ πελέκει καὶ ἄλλα τὰ ταῖς ἀρχαῖς εἶωθότα συμπαρακεῖσθαι προηγείται κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἐκάστῳ τῆς γεγενημένης κατὰ τὸν βίον ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ προαγωγῆς ὅταν δ’ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐμβόλους ἔλθωσι, καθέζονται πάντες ἐξῆς ἐπὶ δίφρων ἐλεφαντίνων. οὗ κάλλιον οὐκ ἐν μαρῶν ἰδεῖν θέαμα νέῳ φιλοδόξῳ καὶ φιλαγάθῳ... ἐξ ὧν καινοποιομένης ἀεὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν τῆς ἐπ’ ἀρετῇ φήμης ἀθανατίζεται μὲν ἡ τῶν καλόν τι διαπραξαμένων εὐκλεία, γνῶριμος δὲ τοῖς πολλοῖς καὶ παραδόσιμος τοῖς ἐπιγινόμενοις ἡ τῶν εὐεργετησάντων τὴν πατρίδα γίνεται δόξα. τὸ δὲ μέγιστον, οἱ νέοι παρορμῶνται πρὸς τὸ πᾶν ὑπομένειν ὑπὲρ τῶν κοινῶν πραγμάτων χάριν τοῦ τυχεῖν τῆς συνακολουθούσης τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς τῶν ἀνδρῶν εὐκλείας.¹⁰

“As a result of this the people remember what happened and picture it before their eyes, not only those who shared in the deeds, but also those who did not. Both share the same feelings to such an extent that the misfortune does not appear as the private concern of the family, but as a public matter for the people. After that they bury the body and perform the customary rites. Then they place a likeness of the dead man in the most public part of the house, keeping it in a small wooden shrine. The likeness is a mask especially made for a close resemblance both as regards the shape of the face and its coloring. They open these masks during public sacrifices and compete in decorating them. And whenever a leading

¹⁰ Polybius 6. 53-54

member of the family dies, they introduce them into the funeral procession, putting them on men who seem most like them in height and as regards the rest of their general appearance. These men assume their costume in addition, if the person was a consul or praetor, a toga with a purple border, if a censor, the all-purple toga, but if someone had celebrated a triumph or done something like that, a gold embroidered toga. These men now ride on wagons and the rods and axes and the other customary equipment of those in power accompanies them according to the dignity befitting the rank and station achieved by each man in politics during his lifetime. And when they reach the *rostra*, they all sit in order on ivory stools. It is not easy for an ambitious and high minded young man to see a finer spectacle than this . . . As a consequence of this, since the reputation for virtue of good men is always being made new, the renown of those who did some noble deed is immortal and the glory of those who rendered service to their country becomes well-known to the many and an inheritance for those who come after. But the greatest result is that the young men are encouraged to undergo anything for the sake of the common cause in the hope of gaining the good reputation which follows upon the brave deeds of men.”

Once again, the realism of the masks is emphasized. Still, the true significance of these portraits is the political and social status of each man being presented. The masks serve as an *exemplum* of the virtues of the deceased and his family. Pliny the Younger goes into greater detail about the practice of creating “realistic portraiture, by which exact likenesses were handed down for all time.” He discusses how the *imagines* were used for funerals to remember all who had lived. In *Epistulae* 2.7.7, he discusses how the portraits erected in public spaces recalled not only the appearance and faces of the men of old, but also their “official dignity and reputation.” Although this letter was written long after the end of the Republic, Pliny nevertheless shows an understanding of the political significance of these portraits beyond being a representation of true likeness.

Sallust also mentions ancestral masks:

. . . *quom maiorum imagines intuerentur, vehementissime sibi animum ad virtutem accendi. scilicet non ceram illam neque figuram tantam vim in sese habere, sed memoria rerum gestarum eam flammam egregiis viris in pectore crescere* . . .¹¹

¹¹ Sallust *Bellum Jugurthinum* 4. 5-6

“ . . . when [Romans] were looking at the masks of their ancestors, their spirits were kindled with an ardent desire for moral excellence. To be sure, the wax itself and the likeness did not have such a force in it, but the memory of deeds done caused that flame to grow in the hearts of these excellent men.”

Sallust recognizes that the likenesses were not special in their own right and this was not the most important function of these masks; the purpose was that the viewer might look upon the faces of the ancestors and be moved by their excellence. It is clear that portraits played an important role in the Roman Republic, but individualized representations appear in Egyptian, Etruscan, and Greek art well before this time.

There is concrete evidence of portraiture in Egyptian art.¹² The Egyptians used art in a funerary context, where representation of the deceased set the stage for individualization. It was important to show the individual who was buried in the tomb. These portraits are largely limited to the representations of pharaohs, and as such it is difficult to distinguish between the images showing a true likeness and images showing a certain character type, employed for the idealization of the pharaohs. This idealization is maintained throughout much of Egyptian art. The bust of Ankh-haf from the Old Kingdom¹³ shows a definite shift towards realism, and the details of the skin texture suggest a possible move towards individualization. The bust shows a receding hairline and distinct lines on the face. This portrait is particularly outstanding as it is a peculiar example from the Old Kingdom. The inscription accompanying the bust states that this man was a son of a king, and he seems to have been an overseer of public works. His portrait is not idealized in form, especially in comparison to the portraits of pharaohs, which were rather generic and interchangeable to create a sense of divinity. The individualism of this portrait could be a result of Ankh-haf's lesser status. Even with this identification, it is impossible to know

¹² Richter even goes so far as to claim that “there is no doubt that in Egypt portraiture, that is, the individualization of a specific person, was practiced much earlier and for a much longer period than elsewhere” (41).

¹³ For image, see <http://zoom.mfa.org/fif=sc3/sc39940.fpx&obj=iip.1.0&wid=568&cell=568,427&cvt=jpeg>, Bust of Ankh-haf, Old Kingdom, painted limestone

without a thorough literary description whether this bust is meant to show a true likeness of the individual. What is more, this statue was alone, which means it is impossible to compare the individualized features between different portraits of the same man. This is often the case for Egyptian art: whenever examples of individualization appear, the statues are either solitary or their fellow representations look nothing alike. This is one of the issues surrounding the “Louvre Scribe” from the Old Kingdom.¹⁴ The image shows a great amount of naturalism, but all other portrayals in this tomb look nothing like this individual.¹⁵ The individualized features of the “Louvre Scribe” could be a result of the status of the man, who was a state official and not a pharaoh, just like the Ankh-haf portrait. It seems that individualism may have been a method of characterizing the common man as distinct from a pharaoh. Despite the clear tendency to show individual features, these portraits are still rather generalized in form. It seems as though artists in the Old Kingdom were capable of showing individualization, but it was “founded on a generic type . . . with a few individual features *applied*.”¹⁶

Similar issues arise in the Middle Kingdom, as portraits “remain always and essentially idealized in concept.”¹⁷ An example is the portrait of Pharaoh Sesostri III from the mid-nineteenth century BCE.¹⁸ The rendering of the skin in this portrait suggests an attempt to realistically portray the physical form of the individual. The face shows a mood of concern, and it is this emotional aspect that seems to dominate the portrait. This expression is recurrent in the portrayal of the pharaohs, and thus the emotion behind this portrait seems to be nothing more than a manifestation of an idealized pharaonic type. The realism of the portrait is “based on the

¹⁴ For image, see

http://www.louvre.fr/sites/default/files/imagecache/940x768/medias/medias_images/images/louvre-quotscribe-accroupiquot.jpg, The Louvre Scribe, Old Kingdom, painted limestone

¹⁵ Breckenridge, 38-40

¹⁶ Richter, 41

¹⁷ Breckenridge, 50

¹⁸ For image, see http://erez.nelson-atkins.org/erez4/cache/Nelson-Atkins%20Collection_Ancient_62-11_Egyptian-HeadOfSesostriIII_front.tif 27ed0a7254861783.jpg, Portrait of Pharaoh Sesostri III, Middle Kingdom

same type and the same formula.”¹⁹ During the New Kingdom, this trend continues such that the majority of portraits are generalized, but there are occasional occurrences of individualism. The results are statues, such as the portrait from the mid seventh century,²⁰ that depict certain types in terms of the individual.²¹ This portrait seems to show an official of Libyan ancestry. The face has individualized features, particularly the wrinkles around the mouth and chin. Examples of realism in the New Kingdom are largely seen on portraits of common men and foreigners. Portraits of pharaohs continue to be highly idealized and generic, emphasizing the pharaoh’s divinity. The realism found in New Kingdom portraits continues to be highly generalized, using the individual to represent a specific type.²² It seems as though Egyptian artists “came close to an understanding of the art of portraiture; but Egyptian culture never gave it reason to develop this understanding into an actual art form.”²³ Instead, “realism was generalized.”²⁴ This likely stemmed from the “inherent nature of Egyptian art itself, the intention of which was to arrest and preserve life rather than to imitate it.”²⁵ Additionally, the Egyptian use of rigid poses may have limited their ability to create realistic portraits.²⁶ Though the funerary context of Egyptian portraits provided a reason to show individualism, these portraits were often of pharaohs who were considered to be gods, thus leading to idealized forms of representation. Egyptian artists were stuck in idealized representations, which would continue to be their norm.²⁷

¹⁹ See discussion in Breckenridge, 48-49; Richter also discusses how portraits in the Middle Kingdom stressed “the type rather than the individual,” suggesting that “a formula for old age” has been applied to the generic type in order to create this portrait. This formula can be seen in many of Sesostri’s successors (41-2)

²⁰ For image, see Breckenridge, page 68, Seventh century portrait, mid 7th century BCE

²¹ Breckenridge, 67

²² Richter, 42

²³ Breckenridge, 71

²⁴ Richter, 42

²⁵ Jackson, 33

²⁶ Richter suggests that it was the Greeks’ ability to break from this mold of rigid poses that allowed them to explore “naturalistic representation” after 500 BCE.

²⁷ Richter argues that Egyptian art was realistic to the point of being ‘veristic.’ Although tendencies towards realism are seen throughout the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, the rendering of the forms continues to be highly idealized until the Hellenistic period, when Roman portraits first make their appearance. Richter herself recognized

True individualized representation is prevalent in Etruscan funerary sculpture. While it is impossible to know definitively whether such portraits show a true likeness to the actual physical form, especially with our lack of literary evidence from the Etruscans, it is nevertheless clear that the Etruscans tended to depict individuals rather than types. The Etruscans experimented with the expression of “personal similitudes.”²⁸ Their portraits seem to depict the individual’s physical form accurately, though the lack of literature and characterization surrounding these forms makes it difficult for modern viewers to understand the personalities behind such representations. As a result, the Etruscans portraits are unique in that they cannot be altered by our understandings of character types in the same way that Roman ‘veristic’ portraits are.²⁹

Etruscan art was heavily influenced by the Orientalizing and later Archaic styles that are associated with Greek art of this same period. The Orientalizing influence can be characterized by the use of Oriental patterns, including palmettes, rosettes, lions, and the sphinx. The use of this style is evidence of the trade that was occurring between Etruria and the East, and persists into the Archaic period.³⁰ Etruscan art continued to be heavily influenced by eastern styles, taking “its chief inspiration”³¹ from Greek art. Early Etruscan figural forms are done in the Greek Daedalic style, a form which is characterized by a stiff, frontal pose, triangular face, large, almond shaped eyes, and often a slight smile. This form is used throughout the entire history of Etruscan art, causing some scholars to characterize it as “derivative” or inferior to the later phases of Classical art.³² Despite the strong influence of the East on Etruscan art, there is a

that the earliest examples of individualized portraits in Egyptian art “are isolated products among many others of a generic type” (43).

²⁸ Brendel, 103

²⁹ The persistent use of archaic forms in Etruscan art has been considered to be the result of the ineptitude of Etruscan sculptors, suggesting that individualized forms are created by this inability to follow an idealized model; however, the continued use of individualization in funerary sculptures would imply that the realism was intentional.

³⁰ See discussion in Richardson, 46; Spivey 40-52; Brendel, 49-62

³¹ Richardson, 88

³² Richardson even calls Etruscan art “downright bad,” but admits that they maintained a style that “was always

tendency towards more individualized forms in Etruscan sculpture, even as early as 600 BCE. The sandstone funerary bust of a woman from Chiusi³³ shows the features of the Daedalic style, with its large, almond shaped eyes, low forehead, and triangular locks of hair.³⁴ This bust represents some of the earliest evidence of the infiltration of Greek sculptural styles into Etruscan art at the end of the seventh century. Around the same time, the representation of the Lady from the Isis Tomb from Vulci³⁵ shows a greater shift towards individualization. This bronze bust from the early sixth century BCE, though of a type quite similar to the Woman of Chiusi, has a face that severely deviates from the Daedalic form. From the blockish head to the smaller eyes and thin lips, the bust shows a departure from the heavily Hellenized form that was characteristic of Etruscan sculpture. This suggests an understanding of the “irregularities of the form . . . [that] are essential characteristics of human individuality.”³⁶ The bust may not accurately represent the true likeness of an individual, but it represents the individuality that exists among humans. The Lady from the Isis tomb is an anomaly in what should be considered a rather persistent imitation of Archaic forms,³⁷ and indeed Etruscan art would continue to imitate Greek archaic forms, but these forms were often manipulated to allow for the application of individualized traits. The key to understanding this derivation from the typical static idealized representation may be due to the way in which such sculptural representations were used by the Etruscans. Whereas the Greeks tended towards the representation of gods, heroes, and the idealized form of man, the Etruscans used sculptures to commemorate and honor the dead

triumphantly Etruscan and never simply uninspired imitation.” (88)

³³ For image, see http://image.shutterstock.com/display_pic_with_logo/315973/315973,1303502637,1/stock-photo-ancient-etruscan-art-magnificent-tomb-chiusi-tuscany-italy-75773986.jpg, Woman from Chiusi, Sandstone, ca. 600 BCE

³⁴ Discussion in Brendel, 96-97

³⁵ For image, see https://www.britishmuseum.org/images/k107537_1.jpg, Lady from the Isis Tomb, Bronze, ca. 600-580 BCE

³⁶ Brendel, 105

³⁷ Spivey, 47

individual. Thus it is likely that the bust of the lady from the Isis Tomb shows this shift towards representing the individual who was buried.

More evidence of individual representation in Etruscan art can be seen in the Canopic urns. Once again, around the same time period of the Lady from the Isis Tomb, there was a tendency towards individualized representation. This shift can be categorized as a transition from the generic to the specific. The head of a Canopic urn from Dolciano³⁸ shows such a transition. This terracotta face from around 600 BCE is generic and imitates an Archaic Greek form, but it has a distinct jaw shape and smile lines.³⁹ This “trend towards physiognomical individualization” was an early “attempt at portraiture.”⁴⁰ A much more dramatic shift towards individualization continues in the mid sixth century on Canopic urns. The Canopic urn from Chiusi⁴¹ and the Canopic urn from Cetona⁴² share certain standard features, but the two figures are individualized. The urn from Cetona has a more pronounced chin and slightly pursed lips, while the urn from Chiusi has a smaller, rounder face. Once again, the two cannot be called true portraits, as the identity of each sitter is unknown. The differences of appearance between the two portraits may exist because of the nature of human reality. The purpose of the images was not to describe a particular character type, rather to show an “immediate and unreflective acceptance of human difference on the level of the actual.”⁴³ Though certain features are standardized, these features are not used for characterization, and it is the differences that are ultimately emphasized. This “realistic outlook remained a dominant characteristic of Italian

³⁸For image, see <http://www.ou.edu/class/ahi4163/slides/044.jpg>, Canopic urn from Dolciano, Terracotta, ca. 600 BCE

³⁹ See discussion in Brendel, 109

⁴⁰ Brendel, 106; Spivey cites this urn as an early example of a “portrait” due to its “developed form” (134)

⁴¹ For image, see Brendel, page 131, Canopic urn from Chiusi, Terracotta, mid 6th century BCE

⁴² For image, see Brendel, page 131, Canopic urn from Cetona, Terracotta, mid 6th century BCE

⁴³ Brendel, 131; again Spivey uses this urn as another example of an early portrait (134)

art.”⁴⁴

The final step in individualized representation in Etruscan art is seen on sarcophagi. Once again, images showing true likeness are being used in a funerary context, an occasion that “called for personal likenesses.”⁴⁵ The two sarcophagi from the mid fourth century from Vulci contrast greatly in style.⁴⁶ Though the two show a similar composition of a man and woman embracing, the terracotta sarcophagus contains figures which are much more individualized while the alabaster sarcophagus shows highly idealized, archaic figures. The alabaster sarcophagus seems to show a certain artistic trope that the terracotta sarcophagus imitates and alters in order to more accurately represent the deceased. Thus the artist of the terracotta sarcophagus was capable of capturing a specific characterization while still showing individualization. Though the two concepts can be used together, they are contrasting in their very nature. This will be an important consideration when attempting to understand Roman ‘verism.’ The limestone sarcophagus from the Parthunus tomb at Tarquinia from the mid third century BCE⁴⁷ similarly shows a combination of characterization and individualization. The man is clearly meant to represent a specific individual, and this individualization extends to his whole body. Still, the sarcophagus is often nicknamed the “Thinker,” implying it is a representation of a character type.⁴⁸ Etruscan portraits seem to be a transition towards the representation of personalities (rather than dry individuation).

⁴⁴ Richter, 39; Richter also states that the Canopic jars are too primitive to be considered a true predecessor of Roman portraits, but the continuity of this practice in later Etruscan funerary statues suggests otherwise.

⁴⁵ Brendel, 387

⁴⁶ For images, see <http://zoom.mfa.org/fif=sc3/sc39668.fpx&obj=iip.1.0&wid=960&cvt=jpeg>, Alabaster Sarcophagus, Vulci, mid 4th century BCE; <http://zoom.mfa.org/fif=sc2/sc281164.fpx&obj=iip.1.0&hei=100&cell=1000,1000&cvt=jpeg>, Limestone Sarcophagus, Vulci, mid 4th century BCE

⁴⁷ For image, see Brendel, page 391, Sarcophagus from the Parthunus Tomb, Limestone, mid 3rd century BCE

⁴⁸ See discussion in Brendel, 390-92

The bronze portrait of a young man from the mid third century BCE,⁴⁹ though standardized with respect to his hair and eyebrows, shows a great level of individualization in his facial features and shape. What is most interesting about this young man is the evidence of personality. The lines around his nose suggest a stern expression. Eventually, this portrayal of personality would become a key component in Roman republican portraits.⁵⁰ A final consideration for understanding the Etruscan tendency towards individualized representation is the lack of contemporary literary discussions concerning their art. Unlike Greek art that tended to develop a literary explanation in order to fit individuals into a character type, the Etruscans felt comfortable representing real people without resorting to literary explanations.⁵¹ The result is that Greek art tended to portray idealized or characterized types while the Etruscans seemed to represent individuals, whose portraits are untainted by preconceived ideas of how the form is intended to be interpreted.

Greek art was long dominated by a tendency towards idealism and characterization. This is most clear in the use of specific types. Whereas Roman realistic representation focused on the exact details of the face of the individual, Greek art used the entire body for representation.⁵² An example of this phenomenon is the Apoxyomenos of Lysippos from around 330 BCE.⁵³ This statue has an idealized face that on its own could represent any man, from an average youth to a young god. It is the positioning of the body that identifies the youth as a specific type: a young

⁴⁹ For image, see

http://www.louvre.fr/sites/default/files/imagecache/940x768/medias/medias_images/images/louvre-portrait-jeune-homme.jpg, Portrait of a young man, Bronze, mid 3rd century BCE

⁵⁰ See discussion in Brendel, 398-400; Jackson discusses the difficulty with Etruscan art, as it seems to have been heavily influenced by Greek art (33). Still, it is easy to see where Etruscan art swayed from this Hellenistic influence, as evidenced above. This portrait is particularly important when considering ‘verism,’ as it shows “dry realism” without any signs of advanced age.

⁵¹ Brendel discusses how the lack of literary evidence from the Etruscans makes it impossible for modern viewers to make claims about the “physiognomical similitude” of Etruscan portraits, 106-109

⁵² Stewart, 46

⁵³ For image, see http://mv.vatican.va/1_CommonFiles/media/photographs/MPC/01_01-Apoxyomenos.jpg, Apoxyomenos of Lysippos, Marble, Roman copy of Greek bronze, ca. 330 BCE

athlete. Though such a representation clearly depicts a realistic form, it is rendered in an idealized manner. Greek representations of individuals relied on allegory and analogy, while true portraiture relies on “literal attention to detail.”⁵⁴ Still, the forms used in Greek art were much more fluid than the forms of Egyptian art. This ability to show realistic body stances may have set the stage for realistic representation.⁵⁵

Tendencies towards individualized representation can be seen throughout Greek art. One of the earliest instances is the statue group of the Tyrannicides from the beginning of the fifth century BCE.⁵⁶ These portraits mark an important step in Greek portraiture as they are one of the earliest examples of a portrait being set up not by the individuals portrayed but by the community “as a way of honoring the achievements of special heroes.”⁵⁷ Indeed, this is a dramatic shift from the practice of Egyptian and Etruscan artists, who primarily used portraits in a funerary context, and is essential for the Roman development of portraiture. The Tyrannicides, however important, can hardly be considered realistic representations of individuals. Indeed, the two figures represented distinct types, one being an older man, as evidenced by his beard and the sagging skin on his chest, and the other a youthful man. Their faces are highly idealized and somewhat Archaic, and their individualism is shown through the employment of character types. They are examples of the specific being represented by means of the generic.

The bust believed to represent Perikles dates to around 430 BCE.⁵⁸ The face is distinct, and the beard and helmet imply that this bust was intended to represent a specific persona. It could be considered a portrait, but the only evidence for this being a portrait is the existence of

⁵⁴ Jackson, 32

⁵⁵ Richter, 43

⁵⁶ For image, see http://www.livius.org/site/assets/files/4576/baths_caracalla_tyranicides_naples1.jpg, Tyrannicides, Marble, Roman copy of Greek original, 5th century BCE

⁵⁷ Breckenridge, 85

⁵⁸ For image, see http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/greece/hetairai/pericles.jpg, Bust of Perikles, Marble, ca. 430 BCE

an inscription which tells the viewer that the man shown is Perikles. It is ultimately nothing more than a “manifestation of a type.”⁵⁹ Indeed, the portrait of Perikles is almost identical to the unidentified *strategos* from Corinth that dates to around 400 BCE,⁶⁰ making it clear that this representation was significant as a characterization rather than as a true likeness.

The close relationship between the Greeks and Romans during the rising use of portraits makes it difficult to determine where the practice originated. The amount of Greek art that was brought into Rome undoubtedly influenced Roman artistic styles.⁶¹ Eventually, “the distinction between ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’ becomes increasingly arbitrary.”⁶² It is easy to consider realistic representations as the natural next step in “an unbroken tradition in Greek portraiture.”⁶³ Still, there are dramatic differences in the tendencies of Greek and Roman representations. The Greeks did not represent the true likeness of an individual because the importance of representations was not placed on the accomplishments of the man but the accomplishments of the “superhuman.”⁶⁴ This is made clear in the statue from the Mausoleum at Halikarnassos,⁶⁵ which dates to around 350 BCE. This portrait is individualized, as evidenced by the man’s facial hair and the slight lines around the nose and in the forehead. Still, “its transcendental nature is shared by most Greek funerary images, its intention being to convey the heroic stature of the

⁵⁹ Breckenridge, 91

⁶⁰ For image, see http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Greek_strategist_Pio-Clementino_Inv306.jpg, Bust of unknown *strategos*, Marble, ca. 400 BCE

⁶¹ JJ Pollitt discusses this relationship in great detail. He looks at the variety of sculptures that had been brought into Rome as well as the literary evidence that discusses this phenomenon. Some Romans, who held the ‘Connoisseur’s attitude,’ saw this influx of Greek imports as a valuable cultural resource, while others ascribed to the ‘Catonian attitude,’ which associated this influx with the “beginning of a slow decay in the moral standards of Roman society.”

⁶² Stevenson, 54

⁶³ Howard, 106

⁶⁴ Breckenridge discusses how Greek art in the Classical period, “while not averse to the creation of images of specific persons, required these images to bring out the superhuman qualities which alone merited the commemoration” (93). This is in stark contrast to the Roman tendency to emphasize the qualities of the individual.

⁶⁵ For image, see http://www.britishmuseum.org/collectionimages/AN00198/AN00198288_001_1.jpg?width=304, Mausolus from Halicarnassos, Marble, ca. 350 BCE

deceased, not his mundane idiosyncrasies.”⁶⁶

Later Greek portraits began to see some individualized tendencies. In the fourth century portrait of Sophocles,⁶⁷ the hair and facial hair conform to a particular characterized type, but there are distinct individualized qualities, such as the lines on his forehead and cheeks. These individualized qualities aided in the characterization of the man, rather than contributing to the true likeness of the portrait. The general trend still leaned towards idealism, but individual traits were beginning to be applied to the idealized form.⁶⁸ This is further emphasized in the late fourth century portrait of Socrates.⁶⁹ The face is highly individualized, with his receding hairline and wrinkled nose. Still, the faces of Sophocles and Socrates bear similar characteristics. The expression of severity as well as the rendering of the cheeks, lips, and forehead suggest that there was still a level of characterization occurring.

Even more striking is a comparison of the different portraits said to portray Sophocles. Though there are certain facial characteristics that remain consistent among these different portraits, they could all arguable represent completely different people. Beyond the clear stylistic differences between the portraits, there are certain facial characteristics that seem to indicate that the representation of the true likeness of Sophocles was not the ultimate goal. Greek art came close to showing true likeness in portraits, but still created generalized characterizations. These characterizations then had individualized traits applied.

Later in the Hellenistic phase of Greek art, portraits become more frequent and even more individualized and naturalistic. This is clear in the portrait of Socrates, for example, as

⁶⁶ Breckenridge, 95-97

⁶⁷ For image, see <http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/13/122213-004-A763AF74.jpg>, Sophocles, Marble, late 4th century BCE

⁶⁸ Breckenridge, 102-103

⁶⁹ For image, see http://www.cornellcollege.edu/classical_studies/images/clsimages/socrates.jpg, Socrates, Marble, late 4th century BCE

discussed above. Nevertheless, these portraits are put into distinct categories, such as the philosopher type or ruler type. It becomes difficult to tell whether, for example, the shape of a portrait's head and face is due to the physiognomy of the man being portrayed or a tool employed to associate the figure with a specific type or school of thought. This can be seen in the portrait of Chrysippus,⁷⁰ whose "interrogative thrust of the head" can be seen in the likenesses of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, to which Chrysippus himself adhered. The portrait's wrinkled nose and open mouth recall the images discussed above of Sophocles and Socrates. The portrait is concerned with the psychology of the man rather than his physical features. Despite this characterization, this portrait does seem to be a shift away from the plasticity of the skin that is characteristic of Greek portraits.⁷¹

Greek portraits are particularly difficult to work with since we rarely know when the original was created. What is more, these portraits were often made posthumously, making it impossible for them to be accurate representations of individuals.⁷² The portrait of Demosthenes⁷³ is an important example, as the portrait can be securely dated. Demosthenes lived from 384-322 BCE, and his portrait was created by Polyeuktos about forty years later. Polyeuktos could not have known how Demosthenes had looked, and thus the image he created

⁷⁰ For image, see http://www.livius.org/a/2/greeks/chrysippus_s.JPG, Portrait of Chrysippus, Marble, Roman copy of Greek original, ca. 200 BCE

⁷¹ Breckenridge gives a thorough discussion about the use of portraits in the portrayal of philosophers. He claims that "each of the major schools of philosophy . . . established its own body of iconography in the form of likenesses of its major figures." He continues to discuss how the Hellenistic period saw an increase in the emotional intensity of portraits that would manifest itself in the baroque style. (130-142)

Rose uses the portrait of Chrysippus as an example of how the Greek philosopher type was a "primary source for 'veristic' portraits." According to Rose, once the beard is removed, there is no fundamental difference between this form and the typical Roman 'veristic' portrait (116-117). In this case, Rose would need to argue that the 'veristic' type is not realistic but characterization.

⁷² Pollini makes a distinction between "realistic" and "veristic" portraits, arguing that Greek portraits can be considered realistic, as they realistically represent a human form, but they are not 'veristic'. He defines 'verism' as "a form of realism based on the actual features of a historical person" (56). Greek portraits, although realistic, cannot be matched to a historical record and are therefore not 'veristic'.

⁷³ For image, see http://classicalwriting.com/Demosthenes_orator_Louvre.png, Portrait of Demosthenes, Marble, Roman copy of Greek original, late 3rd-early 2nd century BCE

must have been of his own invention. It is a realistic representation of a man, which the artist claimed to be a representation of Demosthenes.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this realism is done in a highly characterized manner to show a man who is concerned and reflective. The portrait cannot be an accurate representation of Demosthenes' physiognomical features, but it is a representation of his psychological persona.

There is a variety of evidence to suggest that the Roman 'veristic' style was originally created by Greek artists for a Roman audience. Around the time of the development of Roman portraiture, there was an extreme influx in the amount of Greek art being brought into the city as booty from military expeditions. The art was largely put on public display, turning Rome into a "museum of Greek art."⁷⁵ In addition, Greek sculptors often moved to Italy to work for Roman patrons. Considering that Greek art rarely created realism without a sense of idealism,⁷⁶ it becomes difficult to understand how Greek artists could have created the Roman 'veristic' style. Richter suggests that the Romans had a natural taste for realism, so when Greek artists created intentionally 'ugly' portraits of Romans, the Romans liked the naturalism of the portraits and were ignorant of the insult.⁷⁷ Rose suggests that the influx of booty led the Romans to desire a new portrait type in order to distinguish themselves more easily from the Greeks.⁷⁸

A gold ring from the late third or second century BCE,⁷⁹ found in Capua, is signed by a Greek artist but clearly portrays a Roman. This ring, along with other gems from this period,

⁷⁴ "Unlike verism, which implies that the image is based on the actual physiognomic features of the individual being portrayed, a naturalistic-looking portrait of a named person can be characterized as 'realistic' even if it is not based in any way on the actual features." (Pollini, 42)

⁷⁵ See the discussion in Pollitt, 156-158, and the discussion of Roman attitudes towards Greek art above; Richter, 40

⁷⁶ Richter, 40; Richardson, 77; for image, see <http://ids.lib.harvard.edu/ids/view/18813475?width=560&height=560>, Gold ring from Capua, Late 3rd or early 2nd century BCE

⁷⁷ Richter, 44-46

⁷⁸ Rose 118

⁷⁹ This date comes from Furtwangler in his *Antike Gemmen*.

contains a very realistic portrait.⁸⁰ It seems to suggest that the Greeks were capable of realistic representation in this period. There are also a number of coins made by Greek artists that contain portraits of Romans, portrayed through the use of “dry realism.”⁸¹ These portraits suggest the beginning of realistic representation,⁸² resulting from the need for Hellenistic artists to portray “new types—those of Roman officials living in Greek lands.”⁸³ Such portraits were also used in the representation of Hellenistic kings. This evidence makes it clear that Greek artists were capable of creating portraits in this realistic fashion, and suggests that they only utilized this style when representing foreigners.⁸⁴ While this is an extremely convincing argument, it is still impossible to know whether this practice of realistic representation was used by the Greeks or by the Romans first, nor does it fully explore why the Romans were so interested in showing advanced aged.⁸⁵

The fact that individualization appears in Etruscan, Egyptian, and Greek art means that it is unfair to claim that the Romans were the first to depict the true likeness of an individual in portraits. The difference is that Roman portraits tended to depict older men, whose faces were etched with lines and wrinkles, creating a specific portrait type that has come to be called ‘veristic’. It is necessary to explore the beginnings of such portraits to understand their use in the Roman world.

As previously discussed, portraiture was a longstanding tradition in Roman art. The

⁸⁰ Richter describes them as ‘veristic’ (44)

⁸¹ Pollini considers the coin of Flamininus to be ‘veristic,’ as it is a realistic representation of a historical person.

For image, see http://monetaoro.unicatt.it/images_monete/Rep-03.jpg, Greek coin depicting T. Quinctius Flamininus

⁸² Again, Richter uses the phrase “veristic style” (45)

⁸³ Richter, 45

⁸⁴ This would support the “racist theory” discussed by Jackson, which suggests that Greek artists were intentionally portraying the Romans in an unflattering light (43).

⁸⁵ Pollini argues that advanced age is not a qualifier for the ‘veristic’ style. He thinks that a portrait, even one such as the coin of Flamininus, can be called ‘veristic’ as long as a historical person can be identified to match the portrait. Richter argues that Greek artists used this style because they were working for Roman clients “who had a taste for realism [and were] practical, realistic people” (46). This would suggest that the Romans were already inclined towards realistic representation before Greek artists began using the style.

practice stems from the Roman practice of creating ancestor masks. These wax *imagines* are mentioned by both Polybius and Pliny. Though there is some debate about how these *imagines* were created, there seems to have been two different practices may have been occurring: death masks were being created as a direct cast of the deceased and wax portraits were being created of men who reached the aedileship.

Charles Brian Rose argues that there are two key features that distinguish the ‘veristic’ type: the size and shape of the head and the signs of advanced age. According to Rose, a distinction should be made between the *imagines*, wax masks created for members of the family, and death masks. The *imagines*, as explained by Polybius, were masks worn during funerary processions. Rose describes the process by which such masks would have been made by taking a cast directly from the man’s face.⁸⁶ These masks would have “recorded faithfully the shape of the face as well as the form of the facial features,” thus serving as models for ‘veristic’ portraits.⁸⁷ Rose continues to discuss how the wax *imagines* were made for males of the family when they had come into the aedileship.⁸⁸ In such a case, the man would have been in his mid to late 30s and would not have the wrinkles of an elderly man. Rose concludes that the *imagines*, though a possible inspiration for ‘veristic’ portraits, could not have been the sole source of influence.⁸⁹ He suggests that the Greek philosopher type may have been the inspiration for the portrayal of advanced age.

In his article on verism, David Jackson points to ancestral portraits as an overshadowed

⁸⁶ It is important to note that Rose, and many other authors, fails to provide adequate evidence for the practice of taking a direct cast of a man’s face.

⁸⁷ Rose, 114

⁸⁸ This is based on an excerpt from Pliny the Younger (HN 35.153), in which Piso is given a *demnatio memoriae*. The consular order demands that all statues of Piso should be destroyed, and his wax images should not be carried during his funeral. Since Piso committed suicide during the trial, Rose concludes that his wax portraits must have been created prior to his death. A similar situation occurs during the trial of Libo, who commits suicide during his trial and whose *imagines* are banned from future funerals (Tacitus, *Annales* 2.27-32).

⁸⁹ Rose, 113-5

and overlooked origin of the veristic style. He argues that it is very likely that ancestral portraits took their forms from actual casts taken from nature, based on the literary evidence of Pliny and Polybius. Jackson concedes that these portraits often show signs of death, such as the sunken in cheeks and extension between the mouth and nose. Such features may have been altered on the final product in order to create a more life-like image.⁹⁰ At the same time, he claims that death smoothes away wrinkles rather than enhancing them, which makes it unlikely that ancestral portraits are the sole influence on ‘veristic’ portraiture.⁹¹

Harriet Flower cites Polybius and his discussion of the ancestor masks worn at funerals. She believes that these were “life-masks,” created while a man was still alive.⁹² Though we cannot know how lifelike these masks were, Flower argues that they must have been “recognizable and differentiated” representations “of people as they had looked when they were alive.” At the same time, Flower acknowledges that the masks relied on the funerary oration for explanation of each individual’s significance.⁹³ She goes on to suggest that the intention of the *imagines* to show the “actual likenesses of individuals” thus preserved “the memory of ‘who they were’ and what they looked like’ as an essential part of ‘what they stood for.’”⁹⁴ The masks, first and foremost, served a political function, and their exact likeness of individuals was ultimately less important than the explanation of each individual’s achievements.

Pollini argues that two different practices were occurring. He claims that wax life-masks were created for men achieving the aedileship, though these masks may have been created much later in a man’s life since age was of such importance. Death-masks may have been created if a

⁹⁰ Jackson also notes that the eyes, which would have been closed on the corpse, would be added into the final product.

⁹¹ Jackson, 35-40

⁹² Flower does not discuss the creation of these masks as being a direct cast of the individual’s face.

⁹³ Flower, 342

⁹⁴ Flower, 35-40

man died before his mask had been completed. In this case, the cast would be taken and adjustments would be made to open the eyes and counteract the other signs of rigor mortis.⁹⁵ Pollini cites Lysistratos, a Greek sculptor who reportedly created a method for making a plaster mold from a human face using wax.⁹⁶ This practice was altered by the Romans: whereas Lysistratos would “artistically alter” the life-masks, the Romans focused on their “exactitude” and “verisimilitude.”⁹⁷ Pollini recognizes these masks as the catalysts for ‘veristic’ portraits.

Certain Republican portraits have an appearance that suggests they were influenced heavily by the death-masks, if such a practice occurred.⁹⁸ The portrait of the unknown man from the first century BCE⁹⁹ is a rather realistic representation; however, the face is lifeless, and the sunken cheeks, drawn back lips, and elongation between the nose and mouth show that this portrait may have been created based on a death-mask of this particular individual.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, another first century portrait of an unknown man¹⁰¹ shows signs of lifelessness, including the same sunken cheeks, drawn back lips, and elongation. There is a difference between these two portraits in the rendition of the flesh, which in the latter portrait shows a certain realism and plasticity that is of Hellenistic influence.¹⁰² Since there is no consensus among scholars as to whether or not death-masks were commonly created by taking a direct cast of the deceased, it is impossible to know if these portraits were truly based on this practice. If they are based on

⁹⁵ Pollini, 13-14

⁹⁶ *Hominis autem imaginem gypso e facie ipsa primus omnium expressit ceraque in eam formam gypsi infusa emendare insituit Lysistratus . . .* (Moreover, the first man who molded a human portrait out of plaster from the face itself and to introduce a way of correcting [the end result] from the wax poured into the plaster mold was Lysistratus, Pliny the Elder, HN 35.153; translation from Pollini, 33)

⁹⁷ Pollini, 36; Pollini again provides no literary evidence to show that the Romans themselves took direct casts.

⁹⁸ Both Rose and Jackson agree that the funerary masks were influences in some form.

⁹⁹ For image, see <http://www.digitalsculpture.org/image/3busts-480x350.jpg>, Portrait of unknown man, Marble, 1st century BCE

¹⁰⁰ Jackson, 37

¹⁰¹ For image, see

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/99/Old_man_vatican_pushkin01.jpg/381px-Old_man_vatican_pushkin01.jpg, Portrait of unknown man, Marble, 1st century BCE

¹⁰² Jackson discusses how Roman portraits tended to “emphasize the construction of the face and skull, whilst Hellenistic art shows more concern for the plastic rendition of muscle and for surface detail generally” (37-40).

death-masks, then the faces have been adapted from the mask form to create a more lifelike representation, hence the open eyes. Although these portraits are so dramatically lifeless that they truly seem to be copies of death-masks, the lack of evidence for this practice suggests that the form may have instead been based on the *imagines*, and the lifelessness of these portraits is merely a representation of advanced age.

The third portrait of an unknown first century BCE man¹⁰³ places an extreme emphasis on the rendering of the skin. The lines and wrinkles of this man's face are almost over emphasized. Once again, the exaggerated details of the skin seem to imply that this portrait was an attempt to imitate the style of portraits that were created based on death-masks. The sunken cheeks and drawn back lips are indeed features of the classic death-mask type.¹⁰⁴ Regardless of whether or not death-masks were ever created by the Romans, this portrait shows a strong concern for emphasizing advanced age.

The funerary relief of the family of Publius Gessius¹⁰⁵ shows a later example of individualized representation. The three figures share similar features, such as the shape of the head and the large ears. Still, it is quite clear that each figure represents a different member of the Gessius family. The sunken cheeks and drawn back lips of the central figure suggest that this may be a death-mask imitation, again assuming that the death-mask practice ever occurred. In conclusion, all of these Roman portraits show true individualization, which was an essential part of Roman portraiture, and the lack of idealization suggests that the figures are intended to show true likenesses.

One question that arises when considering Roman portraiture is why there was such an

¹⁰³ For image, see <http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/Images/109images/Roman/republican/headm.jpg>, Portrait of unknown man, Marble, 1st century BCE

¹⁰⁴ See discussion in Jackson, 40-41

¹⁰⁵ For image, see <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~lac61/MFA/Gessius.jpg>, Funerary relief of the family of Publius Gessius, Marble, late 1st century BCE

interest in creating representations that were true to the actual physical form. The practice of creating realistic portraits “. . . was not an external response but an internal one, determined by a political struggle between the old and new nobility.”¹⁰⁶ It seems that the Romans of the Late Republic were overwhelmingly concerned with emphasizing their traditional roots. Men of prominence wished to convey an impression of experience in their portraits in order to gain the trust of the Roman people. There is a constant concern with associating oneself with the idyllic bucolic past in order to evoke the trope of Cincinnatus, a man who was forced into a position of power, becoming the ideal for a “man of affairs”. True and honest representations of the physical form were chosen to convey such a message. This “scientific detachment”¹⁰⁷ resulted in portraits that not only allowed the honest representation of the ‘ugly truth’ of the human form, but also representations that showed the wrinkles and worry lines of an aged face. This soon became a portrait type that showed sternness and concern. The new character type that was created portrayed a man who was concerned with upholding the *mores maiorum*.¹⁰⁸ The expressions of concern were repeated throughout generations, emphasizing a man’s direct connection to his ancestral past.¹⁰⁹ Ancestral masks were used to convey a message and glorify the past; ‘veristic’ portraits sought to do the same thing

Ultimately, this artistic form became a tool for propaganda. Art was the most effective

¹⁰⁶ Pollini, 67

¹⁰⁷ Hanfmann, 41

¹⁰⁸ Hanfmann gives a thorough discussion of this desire for Roman men of the Late Republic to evoke the *priscae virtutes* and *mores maiorum*. He suggests that these men chose portraits of “honest ugliness” due to their “pessimistic attitude toward the emotional and intellectual elements of a human being: ‘this is all that remains in the end.’” He claims that old age was recorded in these portraits “based on a notion that only death puts the final seal of approval upon an honest and virtuous life” (41).

¹⁰⁹ Bell discusses how this was one of the purposes of the wax portraits, in which “such kinship between past and present was on display in the house . . . Showcased in this way, ancestors served not only to advertise before his clients and friends an elite patron’s ‘letters-patent of noble descent’ but also to impress upon members of the household itself (especially its youngest generation) their charge to realize their familial greatness” (9).

vehicle “for articulating the values and fundamental truths of a society,”¹¹⁰ and such an articulation was achieved through the characterization of portraits. Pliny discusses how the use of the *imagines* to show the true likeness of the individual “preserved the memory of ‘who they were’ and ‘what they looked like’ as an essential part of ‘what they stood for.’”¹¹¹ The use of realistic representation was a tool used to convey a message about the character of an individual. This is the fundamental contradiction of the ‘veristic’ style. It is a combination of realism and characterization.

Most interestingly, while these two concepts are incongruous in modern understanding, this association was a truth in Roman society. According to Anthony Corbeill in his study on *Controlling Laughter* in ancient Rome, deformities in the human form were believed to be signals of “moral fault.”¹¹² Indeed, Romans of the Late Republic “created and reinforced [their] own concept of ‘Romanness’ through the use of public invective,”¹¹³ and this invective was more often than not directed against the human form. The result of such invective was that “the Roman conception of physical appearance [became] very much a conscious construction.”¹¹⁴ Ultimately, the responsibility for any deformity was placed on the person who bore the deformity, and accordingly this person could be “rebuked for [his] physical appearance.”¹¹⁵ The line between portrait abuse and corporal abuse becomes blurred by this understanding, such that in the empire, a *damnatio memoriae* could be placed on the most hated emperors, allowing the people to take out their frustrations on the portraits of the late emperor. There was a direct connection between the portrait and the man himself.¹¹⁶ This is significant for understanding

¹¹⁰ Stevenson, 48

¹¹¹ See discussion in Flower, 39-40

¹¹² Corbeill, 9

¹¹³ Corbeill, 15

¹¹⁴ Corbeill, 15

¹¹⁵ Corbeill discusses Cicero’s opinions on this subject (25-26)

¹¹⁶ See the discussion in Flower’s chapter of Varner’s *Tyranny and Transformation*.

Roman ‘verism.’ Just as our understanding of ‘verism’ conflates the concepts of characterization and realism, the Romans themselves seemed to have had difficulty separating the two concepts. The physical form of a man was the direct result of his character.

There is evidence that true likeness was less important than this characterization. The obsession with creating realistic portraits seems to have manifested itself in the practice of characterization. Rose discusses how the ‘veristic’ type focuses on the size and shape of the head and facial features in advanced age. Indeed, in his understanding, the term seems to be applied exclusively to the portraits of elderly men. This is one of the key issues of ‘verism.’ If the style truly focused on the realistic representation of individuals, portraits of younger men would be included in the category.¹¹⁷ The style instead focuses on advanced age, used to show severity and experience. Such representations may still be realistic representations of individuals, and they most certainly are not idealized in the Hellenistic fashion. On the other hand, this individuation should be considered and analyzed separately from the character trope of sternness. ‘Verism’ in essence means realism, but it is more often applied to a characterization that manipulates realism.

What is considered ‘veristic’ is a conflation of two separate ideas: a representation of the true likeness of an individual, and a representation of a certain character type. Realistic representation existed long before the Roman ‘veristic’ style began. ‘Verism’ should not be considered a new style of representation but a new manifestation of a character type. Just as the Greek philosopher type was a characterization with individualized traits applied, so the Roman ‘veristic’ style applied a character type to individual representation.

¹¹⁷ Pollini mentions this issue in the discussion of ‘verism,’ concluding that the term ‘veristic’ should not be applied exclusively to portraits depicting advanced age. ‘Veristic’ portraits represent specific individuals, whereas ‘realistic’ portraits merely look real.

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